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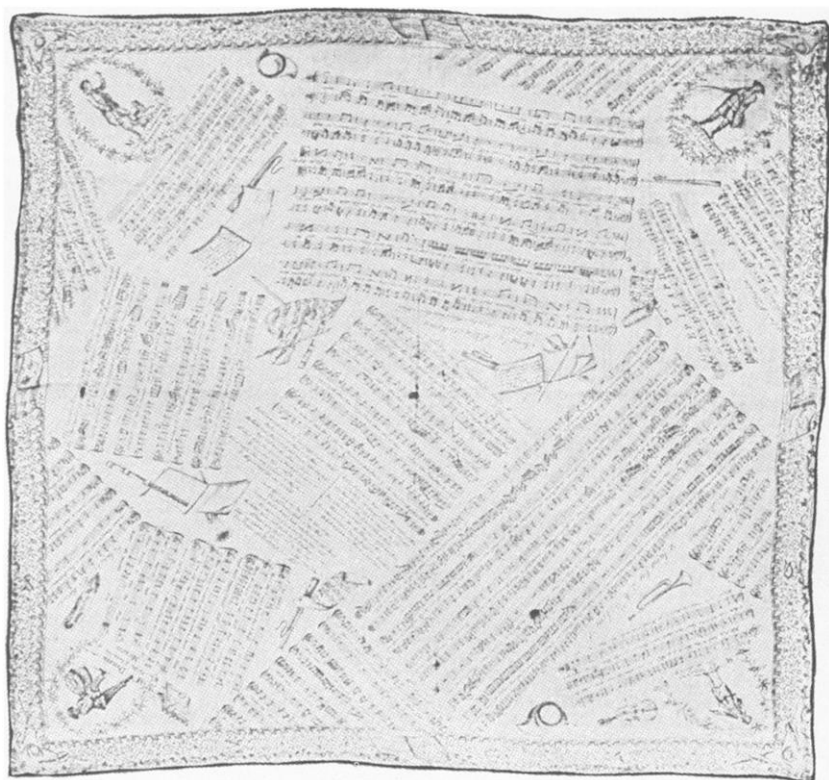
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# AN OLD ENGLISH MUSIC HANDKERCHIEF

By W. J. LAWRENCE

POSSIBLY there exists no neater epitome of the prime characteristics of popular English music in the third quarter of the eighteenth century than that which is presented by a capacious old stamped-cotton handkerchief which recently came into my possession, and of which a much reduced facsimile is now given. What with its snatches of well-remembered song and its character portraits of favourite singers one can well imagine the host of happy recollections of nights spent at the theatre this quaint souvenir must have conjured up on occasion for its original owner. Very reverent must have been the handling it received from its long line of possessors viewing its wonderful state of preservation. Its measurements (25x27 inches) bear eloquent testimony to the Gargantuan capacity of old-time coat-pockets. Of the man Crayford who inscribed his name in the corner as engraver nothing is known. Never dreaming that his work would be submitted to remote antiquarian scrutiny, he did not trouble to append a date; but, as it happens, the handkerchief fairly well dates itself. One has only to review the evidence it presents to arrive at the conclusion that it was issued in or about the year 1771.

Let us glance briefly at the theatrical productions whose well-sustained popularity it so strikingly commemorates. In opposite corners portraits are given from well-known prints of Mattocks as the Squire and Du Bellamy as Thomas in *Thomas and Sally, or the Sailor's Return*, but no music from the little piece is included among the songs. Tradition has it that Bickerstaffe and Arne's "musical entertainment", as the phrase went, was originally produced in Dublin, but, if so, no record of its initial performance has come down to us. Until such time as research can supply the missing details, its stage history must date from November 28, 1760, when it was first seen at Covent Garden. Mattocks then played the Squire and Beard (not Du Bellamy, who figured in a much later revival) was the Thomas. Simple as was the little piece, with its crude story of easily-thwarted seduction, it long enjoyed vogue in town and country. So true is it that alluring



**A Late Eighteenth Century Music Handkerchief.**

(Specially photographed for *The Musical Quarterly* from the example in the possession of Mr. W. J. Lawrence by A. Redding, Dublin.)

melody has perennial capability of covering a multitude of theatrical blemishes.

Thomas Mattocks was of that useful type of player who could sing, the type which makes no pretensions to scientific knowledge but manages to hide its defects by certain manifestations of musical instinct and natural taste. That Mattocks' vocalism must have had glamorous appeal is undoubted, else Hugh Kelly would hardly dare have written of him in his *Thespis* as one

Whose tender strain, so delicately clear,  
Steals, ever honied, on the heaviest ear;  
With sweet-ton'd softness exquisitely warms,  
Fires without force, and without vigour charms.

Mrs. Mattocks, it may be noted, was not only an excellent actress but came of that Hallam stock which figured so prominently as pioneers of the drama in America.

Time has not dealt gently with memories of Du Bellamy, that second-rate Welsh tenor to whose undoubted vogue our souvenir in divers ways abundantly testifies. Perhaps this was because he was *vox et præterea nihil* and not too much *vox* at that. Self-conscious to a fault his stage qualifications were of the slightest. He was very awkward in his deportment and had an ugly trick when singing of cocking up his thumbs. Apropos of the fact that he had originally been a shoemaker, Peake, in his *Memoirs of the Coleman Family*, relates the following anecdote:

In proof of 'what is bred in the bone,' it was told of Du Bellamy that, when he had quitted his original occupation for the stage, he one day gallanted some ladies to a shop in Cranbourn Alley, who went thither to purchase shoes. In his great zeal to see them well fitted, he found such technical fault with the articles offered to them for sale that the shopman could bear it no longer. "Come, come, master," said he to Du Bellamy, "this is telling the secrets of the trade, and that's not fair to one another."

After singing for a number of years at Covent Garden and the Haymarket, Du Bellamy repaired to Dublin, making his début at the Theatre Royal, Crow Street on November 5, 1777, as Lorenzo in *The Governess* (a pirated version of *The Duenna*), and remaining some time. His sister, who lives in theatrical annals as Mrs. Didier, had made her first appearance on the stage in the same city in November, 1764, when she came out at Smock Alley as Madge in Bickerstaffe's *Love in a Village*. After his Dublin sojourn Du Bellamy voyaged to New York, where he ended his days under another (perhaps his real) name.

Mention of Bickerstaffe's longevous rustic opera recalls to mind that its initial vogue at Covent Garden in 1762 and perennial popularity later are significantly indicated on our old-time music handkerchief. Not only are we given a portrait of Beard in his original character of Hawthorn—the character, by the way, in which, on May 23, 1767, he made his last appearance on the stage; but we have included a fragment of Hawthorn's song in the first act, "Let gay ones and great make the most of their fate." All things considered, there is no room for doubting that John Beard was the greatest English male dramatic vocalist of his time. Artist to the finger-tips, he was as much enjoyed as actor as he was as singer. It is needless to add that the man for whom Handel composed the bulk of the tenor parts in his great oratorios was on the crest of the wave so far as scientific knowledge was concerned. Before retiring in the prime of life with a comfortable fortune Beard had one other achievement to his credit. Member of a still discredited profession, he was the first actor to break down the barriers of caste. His high and amiable character, aided doubtless by his talents, won for him the hand of a peer's only daughter. But Death envied them their happiness and in a few years carried the lady off.

Among the musical extracts given on the handkerchief is Apollo's song from the opening act of *Midas*, "Lovely nymph assuage my anguish", as sung by Du Bellamy at Covent Garden in a recent revival of Kane O'Hara's lively and melodious burletta. In spite of the fact that like many of the comic operas of the time, it was a mere musical hotch-potch, this amusing parody of Italian-opera methods long retained its popularity, and although given finally in somewhat abbreviated form, held its place in the theatrical repertory well into the nineteenth century. Its later vogue is said to have established the convention of women appearing on the light operatic stage in male characters, an appeal to the baser instincts which ended in the creation of that artistic abomination, the Principal Boy. It is noteworthy that although first seen in England at Covent Garden on February 22, 1764, *Midas* had originally been produced in Dublin (where its witty author lived), at Crow Street, on January 22, 1762.

Prominent among the successful comic operas of the period for which original music had been provided is *The Padlock*. So seldom in theatrical annals has the composer of an opera sustained one of the characters in its original production, it seems quite in keeping with the eternal fitness of things that Charles Dibdin, of sea-song celebrity, should be commemorated in his dual capacity

in this our souvenir.<sup>1</sup> His portrait as Mungo in Bickerstaffe's piece and the fragment of Mungo's song in the first act, "Dear heart, what a terrible life am I led" draw attention to the fact that, although the negro had figured on the stage ever since those remote days when Cokain had written *The Obstinate Lady* and made Carionel disguise himself as a Spanish-talking black, Dibdin was the first player to win acceptance for the type. There can be little doubt that the novelty of the characterisation was not least among the factors which gained for *The Padlock* immediate popularity on its production at Drury Lane on October 3, 1768. The opera is otherwise commemorated in the souvenir by the music of Leonora's song in the first act, "Say little, foolish, fluttering thing", given with the vague heading, "Sung by Mrs. Arne."

It is curious that nobody in England should have been seized with the possibilities of Fielding's *Tom Jones* as a subject for stage treatment until France had pioneered the way. In 1766, or sixteen years after the famous novel had been translated into French, a *comédie lyrique* was founded upon it, the book by Poinciset and the music by Philidor. This inspired Joseph Reed with the idea of his comic opera of *Tom Jones*, which, with music partly original and partly compiled (none of it, however, taken from the French prototype) was brought out with fair success at Covent Garden on January 14, 1769. Mattocks was the Tom Jones, Shuter the Squire Western, Du Bellamy the younger Nightingale and Mrs. Pinto the Sophia. As one of the latest productions, the opera is well represented on the souvenir. The air so curiously headed "Sung by Mr. Du Bellamy at the Castle Society Haberdasher's Hall" is in reality young Nightingale's song, "Blest with thee my soul's dear treasure," as rendered to music from Bach in the second act. Fragments are also given of three other solos, Tom Jones's "Sound, sound aloud Britannia's name," Sophia's "Duty is nature's strongest law" and Squire Western's "How happy a father am I." Of these the music of the second was by Arnold and the third was sung to the air of "Sir Simon the King," already made familiar in *The Beggar's Opera*.

One recalls how, a little better than two years before the production of *Tom Jones*, the Sophia of the cast, then known as Charlotte Brent, had aroused the indignation of Dr. Arne, her

<sup>1</sup>By a curious coincidence, I discovered some time after writing this article that Dibdin's great grandson and prospective biographer, Mr. Edward Rimbault Dibdin, curator of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, has another example of the handkerchief under discussion. Unfortunately, however, it is in somewhat tattered condition.

mentor, by becoming Thomas Pinto, the violinist's, second wife. All the recognised authorities blunder sadly over this lady's career in saying that she made her first appearance on the stage at Drury Lane in 1758. Three years previously, while still in her pupilage, Arne brought her to Dublin, where she made her *début* on November 29, 1755 in the title-character in *Eliza* and sang occasionally later in the season. For her benefit on April 30, 1756, she appeared for the first time as Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, the role in which three years later she achieved so notable a success at Covent Garden. Whatever the reason, whether from timidity or inexperience, she made no sort of impression upon Irish music-lovers. Much was forgiven in the Dublin of old to the comely stage novice but Charlotte Brent had neither good looks nor figure. Perhaps we have a clue to her initial failure in the statement made in the MS. autobiography of Charles Dibdin the younger, an interesting budget of recollections which its present owner has permitted me to peruse. Dibdin maintains that she had "a very trifling voice," and that Arne wrote bravura songs for her, like "The Soldier Tired," to hide its deficiencies. Which recalls what Churchill wrote in *The Rosciad*:—

Let Tommy Arne, with usual pomp of style,  
Whose chief, whose only merit's to compile,  
Who, meanly pilf'ring here and there a bit,  
Deals music out as Murphy deals out wit,  
Publish proposals, laws for taste prescribe,  
And chant the praises of an Italian tribe;  
Let him reverse kind Nature's first decrees,  
And teach e'en Brent a method not to please.

Two of the items given on this wonderfully comprehensive handkerchief are seemingly taken from popular operas of the day, but all my efforts to run them to earth have unfortunately proved unavailing. One is a fragment beginning "On yonder plain's a flock of sheep," given as sung by Mrs. Arne, and the other a ditty called "Love in Disguise," which occupies a pride of place centrally and was evidently deemed of paramount importance since all its stanzas are reproduced. The vicious principle of the introduced song was then creeping into vogue in opera, and the latter, which begins with "At Totterdown Hill there dwelt an old pair," was probably of this order. It is described as "set by Mr. Battishill," and "sung by Mr. Du Bellamy at Covent Garden Theatre." Jonathan Battishill had been conductor of the Covent Garden orchestra from 1760 or thereabouts. A portrait of him

is given in Mr. Henry Saxe Wyndham's "Annals of Covent Garden Theatre."

Although the foregoing enumeration exhausts all the operatic possibilities of our souvenir it by no means says the last word regarding its contents. Popular domestic music is represented by four catches, "Wilt thou lend me thy mare to go a mile?" "'Twas you, sir; 'twas you, sir," "Here lyes, here lyes, the Lord have mercy upon her," and "Hark, the bonny Christ Church bells." Most likely all of these were veterans in service. Years before, the music of the last had been utilised in two ballad operas, *The Village Opera* (1729) and *The Chambermaid* (1730). Thus is it, in the words of the Eastern proverb, that "the Useful struggles vainly with Time, but the devourer of all things breaks his teeth upon the Agreeable."